

# **Rapid Watershed Assessments**

## **Overview**

The Colorado Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is encouraging the development of rapid watershed assessments in order to increase the speed and efficiency of generating information to guide conservation implementation, as well as the speed and efficiency of putting it into the hands of local decision makers.

## **Background Information**

Rapid watershed assessments provide initial estimates of where conservation investments would best address the concerns of landowners, conservation districts, and other community organizations and stakeholders. The intent of these assessments is to help land-owners and local leaders set priorities and determine the best actions to achieve their goals.

These assessments are conducted by inventorying natural resources within the hydrologic units at the 8 digit level. Primary assessment focus will be on agricultural areas with the goal of identifying conservation opportunities and current levels of resource management, and estimating impacts of these opportunities on the local priority resource concerns.

## **Benefits of these Activities**

While these rapid assessments provide less detail and analysis than full-scale studies and plans, they do provide the benefits of NRCS locally-led planning in less time and at a reduced cost. The benefits also include:

- Quick and inexpensive plans for setting priorities and taking action
- Providing a level of detail that is sufficient for identifying actions that can be taken with no further watershed-level studies or analyses
- Actions to be taken may require further Federal or State permits or ESA or NEPA analysis but these activities are part of standard requirements for use of best management practices (BMPs) and conservation systems
- Identifying where further detailed analyses or watershed studies are needed
- Plans address multiple objectives and concerns of landowners and communities
- Plans are based on established partnerships at the local and state levels
- Plans enable landowners and communities to decide on the best mix of NRCS programs that will meet their goals
- Plans include the full array of conservation program tools (i.e. cost-share practices, easements, technical assistance)